

Dear Hornet Community Members: (email separately to students, faculty & staff, parents & guardians)

Books are windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for readers.¹ When a young reader consumes a book with characters and plots that reflect their own lives, the reader's lived experiences are validated. When young readers consume literature with characters and plots that are different from their own lives, a "window into another perspective" is created which helps the reader build empathy, critical thinking skills, and a better understanding of the world at large. Essex High School recently learned that a book in our library is being discussed on various websites.

There is a long history in the United States of certain books being targeted and banned. The Office for Intellectual Freedom has reported a large increase in the number of book challenges and has, itself, issued a statement noting that a disproportionate number of challenged books are about the LGBTQIA+ experience, despite being underrepresented in publishing². The book in question in our library is *Gender Queer*, an award-winning memoir recounting an asexual, nonbinary person's path to self-discovery and coming out.

At Essex High School and across the Essex Westford School District we know how critically important it is within our curriculum, libraries, classrooms, and school community to have a representation of a plethora of lived experiences. Our students have a right to a well-balanced library collection, including *Gender Queer*, which is one title sitting among numerous titles featuring cisgender, heterosexual relationships which, on a side note, are not being targeted.

We follow Article II of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights³, recognized in our media selection procedure⁴, which states, "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." The District has systems and structures in place for reconsidering books to ensure titles are reviewed by a panel of trained professional librarians from across the District. The policies and procedures of the American Librarian Association and the Essex Westford School District ensure that our students see themselves reflected in our library collections, and those different from them, to actively work against hate, exclusion, and bias.

Books allow our children to explore our world and others in a safe and appropriate way. We reaffirm our commitment to following our selection and reconsideration procedures for library materials by school librarians for the betterment of our students and communities, as we continue toward our vision of "growing hearts and minds for a better today and tomorrow—every day, every way, every one,"

EHS Librarians & Leadership Team

***instead of footnotes actually link to the articles and people and procedures???

¹ Rudine Sims Bishop, The Ohio State University. "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" originally appeared in *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*. Vo. 6, no. 3. Summer 1990.

² ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom Staff. (2021, November 30) *The American Library Association Opposes Widespread Efforts to Censor Books in U.S. Schools and Libraries*. Intellectual Freedom Blog. <https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/?p=27454>

³ "Library Bill of Rights", American Library Association, June 30, 2006. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill> (Accessed December 1, 2021) Document ID: 669fd6a3-8939-3e54-7577-996a0a3f8952

⁴ Media Selection Procedure, Essex Westford School District, accessed December 2nd, 2021. <https://www.ewsd.org/Page/8397>